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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5624  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0133  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4451  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3710  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7231  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4809  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 1031  
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1030  
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0816  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000072

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: ICRC CUTS STAFF BUT STANDS FIRM

REF: A. 06 RANGOON 1794

[1](#)B. 06 RANGOON 1743

[1](#)C. 06 RANGOON 1622

RANGOON 00000072 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Burma has steadily reduced its staff in the wake of regime requirements that forced ICRC to curtail most of its activities. However, ICRC's prosthetics program continues to operate at full strength. ICRC is committed to maintaining a presence at all five of its field offices as it presses the government to clarify what it will allow ICRC to do. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Deputy Head of Delegation, Thierry Ribaux, told us on January 17 that ICRC has steadily reduced its staff after the regime stopped ICRC from conducting private visits with prisoners in late 2005. ICRC decided to further reduce staff after the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) told it to close its five field offices in November 2006 (ref C). At a subsequent meeting on December 8, the MHA "clarified" that it did not mean that the offices actually had to close, but just cease some of their activities (ref A). To ICRC's question about which activities they could continue, the minister replied vaguely, "as in the past." ICRC believes the international outcry after the ICRC press statement of November 27 (ref B), which announced that the regime had ordered it to close its field offices, forced the later "clarification."

[1](#)3. (C) Ribaux stressed that ICRC believes it is important to keep at least one expatriate staff member head at each of its five field offices. While their expatriate staff do not enjoy diplomatic immunity, they are better able than local Burmese staff to resist pressure from local authorities and thus offer a degree of protection to ICRC's local staff. ICRC will remove its permanently employed ICRC "delegates"

from each of its field offices, but will keep a contract-hired expatriate translator to head each field office. Ribaux said ICRC can always redeploy delegates back to Burma from its programs in other countries, but its expatriate translators are difficult to replace. If ICRC ever gets permission to resume private visits to prisons, it will need to rely on these valued expatriate staff.

¶4. (C) Contrary to recent media reports, Ribaux said ICRC's prosthetics program at its flagship rehabilitation center that operates in cooperation with the Myanmar Red Cross Society in Hpa-an, Karen State, continues operating normally.

ICRC also continues to support three prosthetic centers operated by the Ministry of Health and three others operated by the Ministry of Defense. Ribaux did not specifically mention plans to reduce local Burmese staff.

#### WHAT NEXT?

¶5. (C) ICRC has actively sought another appointment with the Minister of Home Affairs. ICRC will try to get the MHA to clarify whether "as in the past" means ICRC activities of a few months ago or a few years ago. ICRC wants the MHA to define which activities must cease and which it can continue.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Although the ICRC continues to reduce its staff in response to the GOB's restrictions on its activities, its commitment to its Burma program remains strong. ICRC will keep a skeleton crew at its five field offices and its core staff at its Rangoon country headquarters to be ready to resume operations quickly if negotiations with the MHA succeed. However, in the wake of the UNSCR veto, and with the bad press it received for curtailing ICRC's field operations abating, the regime holds the upper hand. The ICRC's announcement of staff cuts is part of its strategy to keep international attention on this

RANGOON 00000072 002.2 OF 002

issue. END COMMENT.  
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